



The city and its Subjects: A Reading of *Little Dorrit* and *In the Year of Jubilee*

Nellickal A. Jacob

Department of English, University of Delhi (Ramjas College), New Delhi, India

Received: 13 May 2025; Received in revised form: 11 Jun 2025; Accepted: 15 Jun 2025; Available online: 20 Jun 2025

©2025 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— In both Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1857) and George Gissing's *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894) the spatial logic of the city and its topography play a constitutive role in the formation and development of character. Architectural forms and the labyrinthine nature of nineteenth-century London determine the kinds of action and movement that define and limit characters. In *Little Dorrit* we see a bleak example of the above in the carceral model represented by the Marshalsea prison for London's debtors. The novel illustrates how exterior spaces impinge on inner experiences and shape character in tangible ways. Gissing's *In the Year of Jubilee* shows us the ideological forms that shape the experience of living in suburban London. While Gissing's novel describes a higher social class and its aspirations, the novel gives us a fascinating insight into the gendered nature of urban space as experienced by its central character Nancy Lord. Both novels show, in similar yet different ways, how the urban environment directly impacts the spatial grammar of the novel and as a consequence shapes the very form of these novels

Keywords— Charles Dickens, George Gissing, City spaces, Carceral, Little Dorrit, In the Year of Jubilee



I. INTRODUCTION

This paper will examine representations of the city in the Victorian novel. It will focus on two novels—Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1857) and George Gissing's *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894)—novels separated not just by about forty years of history but also, as this essay will demonstrate, by a marked difference in the way representations of the city inform the structural and thematic organization of the novels. My focus will be on the problematic of city spaces and the kinds of mobility that such a mapping presumes for its subjects. The very spatial organization of the city along specific grids of class and gender constitutes certain modes of subjectivity as well as provides the logic for these subjectivities to challenge and transgress the different modalities of space. The city in both novels seems to impose certain kinds of restrictions on movement, a point that in Dickens's novel is literally embodied in the Marshalsea prison. However, despite such similarities in the protocols of representing the city and the manner in which it informs the action in these novels, both

Little Dorrit and *In the Year of Jubilee* deal in different ways with the idea of mobility and space in the city.

II. LITTLE DORRIT AND THE CARCERAL CITY

Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, first published in 1857, represents a London that existed about thirty years prior to its date of publication. The city is not just the background for the events in the novel but is explicitly shown to inform and influence the kinds of mentalities and structures of feeling that are possible in the city. The city is integral to the conceptualization of the novel and structurally informs the action of the novel. As Raymond Williams points out:

Dickens's ultimate vision of London is then not to be illustrated by topography or local instance, It lies in the form of his novels: in their kind of narrative, in their method of characterization, in their genius for typification. It does not matter which way we put it: the experience of the city is the fictional method; or the fictional method is the experience of the city (Williams 158).

One way in which this finds direct expression in the novel is through the representation of character as a product of the very spatial and architectural organization of the city—“Metaphoric relations between houses and their occupants” are particularly reiterated in *Little Dorrit* (Deffenbacher 123). This takes a number of forms in the novel: it appears both in the degree to which city spaces and architectural forms determine character and produce certain kinds of attitudes and dispositions, and also gets reflected in the vocabulary and syntax that is used to describe the material circuitry of the city and forms of spatial organization. A central motif that pervades the novel is the fluid boundaries between the inner spaces of the mind and the exterior spaces of the city. The material and spiritual poverty of the city bleeds into the bodies and souls of its inhabitants. In fact, the permeable skin between the city and its subjects seem to allow a curious osmosis that often permits the city to take on human attributes. This two-way traffic between the material realities of the city and the individual characters that are shaped and in turn shape the structures of the city account for many of the moments of instability in the novel.

The traffic between interior and exterior spaces is made manifest in the very first paragraph of *Little Dorrit* that describes London's “melancholy streets” that are shown to have “steeped the souls of the people who were condemned to look at them out of windows, in dire despondency” (*Little Dorrit* 67). The city's architecture and layout seem to produce its inhabitant's “brooding mind” through spatially replicating the dull monotony of their lives: “Nothing to see but streets, streets, streets. Nothing to breathe but streets, streets, streets” (*Little Dorrit* 67-68). The imposition of material structures on the mind is made to rhetorically loop back so as to give the very buildings a foreboding human countenance: “Ten thousand responsible houses surrounded him [Arthur Clennam], frowning as heavily on the streets they composed, as if they...bemoaned their miseries every night” (*Little Dorrit* 68). Later, when Little Dorrit and Maggy are locked out of their respective homes and spend a night on the streets, the view from the London bridge reveals, “little spots of lighted water where the bridge lamps were reflected, shining like demon eyes, with a terrible fascination in them for guilt and misery” (*Little Dorrit* 217).

The idea of one's house as representing, what Gaston Bachelard calls “the intimate topography of our intimate being” is often on display in *Little Dorrit*: “The house even more than the landscape, is a ‘psychic state’” (Bachelard xxxvi, 72). Mrs. Clennam's house is perhaps the one structure that draws together most dramatically the mutually constitutive relation between houses and individuals. Having long concealed within its bowels the secrets that hold the key to the denouement of the plot, it needs to literally self-destruct in order for these secrets to be

disembowelled. Mrs. Clennam in particular appears to symbolize the inscrutability of its structure, which is buried in its labyrinthine interiors: “The shadow still darkening as he [Arthur] drew near the house...its close air was secret. At the heart of it his mother presided, inflexible of face, indomitable of will, firmly holding all the secrets of her own and his father's life...” (*Little Dorrit* 597).

In addition to the city's spatial dynamics the human sensorium is also conditioned and organized by the rhythms of the city and its sounds. For example, the auditory signals of the city (in addition to the visual signals) seem literally to impair Affery's sense of hearing by imposing on her a telegraphically punctuated set of sounds: “As to street noises, the rumbling of wheels in the lane merely rushed in at the gateway in going past, and rushed out again: making the listening Mistress Affery feel as if she were deaf, and recovered the sense of hearing by instantaneous flashes” (*Little Dorrit* 220).

The interpenetration of descriptive language used for detailing buildings and houses with that used to describe individual characters further fortifies, what Raymond Williams describes as the “relations between persons and things...The city is shown as at once a social fact and a human landscape. What is dramatized in it is a very complex structure of feeling” (Williams 158). A good example of such a discursive blending is the description of the Meagles residence:

It was made out of an old brick house, of which a part had been altogether pulled down, and another part had been changed into the present cottage; so, there was a hale elderly portion to represent Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, and a young picturesque, very pretty portion to represent Pet. There was even the later addition of a conservatory sheltering itself against it uncertain of hue in its deep-stained glass...which might have stood for Tattycoram. (*Little Dorrit* 235).

The language here is not merely trying to drive home the architectural conception of character through its attempt to forge an interchangeability between individual character and material structures. In fact, the novel here appears to be uncertain of the stability of its own metaphorizing. The analogies between the different parts of the Meagles residence and its inhabitants suggest a set of equivalences between character and space that are far from settled and stable. The differences between the old and new portions of the house also denote the provisional and temporary nature of the relationship. Pet is not going to be contained any more by the parental structures that try and dissuade her from marrying Henry Gowan. Similarly, Tattycoram's subsequent desertion from the house underlines the fragility of the ties that bind the Meagles household together. The

relations between people and houses are not therefore of a nature that produce stable hierarchies or ordered systems of meaning, but rather even as they articulate such states of semantic equilibrium, they create the possibilities for their disordering.

Interestingly, *Little Dorrit* opens not in London but in Marseilles, a city described as suffering from over exposure to the sun. The harsh glare of the August sun blankets the city in an inescapable visibility that seems to run counter to visibility itself: "The universal stare made the eyes ache" (*Little Dorrit* 39). Amidst this hostile visual environment lies the prison that houses Rigaud and Cavalletto which is described as being deprived of light. The rhetorical weight of the passages that describe the prison is one that defines the very quintessence of incarceration in terms of the lack of light and visibility: "a villainous prison...so repulsive a place that even the obtrusive stare blinked at it, and left it to such refuse of reflected light as it could find for itself... Like a well, like a vault, like a tomb, the prison had no knowledge of the brightness outside" (*Little Dorrit* 40-1). The visual deprivation is compounded by the staleness of the atmosphere: "The imprisoned air...would have kept its polluted atmosphere intact in one of the spice islands of the Indian ocean" (*Little Dorrit* 41). J. Hillis Miller in his reading of the carceral theme in the novel describes how the "symbol of imprisonment expresses Dickens' sense of human life as enclosed and limited, whether by physical or spiritual walls, and...the image of life as a labyrinth expresses his sense that human beings are all lost inextricably in a maze without beginning, end, or pattern..." (Miller 235)

It is significant that a chapter later the first few words used to describe London are "gloomy, close, and stale" (*Little Dorrit* 67). The city as a prison with no exit possible is an idea that is frequently deployed in the novel. Like the prison at Marseilles, the city shuts out most forms of sensory relief. It works on the principle of denial and deprivation: "Everything was bolted and barred that could by possibility furnish relief to an overworked people. No pictures, no unfamiliar animals, no rare plants or flowers, no natural or artificial wonders of the ancient world... Nothing for the spent toiler to do but to compare the monotony of his seventh day with the monotony of his six days" (*Little Dorrit* 67). Places such as the Bleeding Heart Yard ("inhabited by poor people who set up their rest among its faded glories... that you got into down a flight of steps which formed no the original approach, and got out of by a low gateway into a maze of shabby streets") (*Little Dorrit* 176) and the Circumlocution Office (representing the stranglehold of the bureaucracy on the common man), reveals different kinds of control and confinement that the city exercises on the imagination.

The debtors' prison at Marshalsea represents an interesting fictive doubling of the idea of incarceration and the city. If London imprisons its subjects in an unwholesome atmosphere from "which they had no escape between the cradle and the grave" (*Little Dorrit* 67), the prison within the prison that the Marshalsea represents is strangely able to offer a perverse form of freedom from the inexorable logic of the city. As Dr. Haggage the Marshalsea doctor puts it, "Nobody comes here [the Marshalsea prison] to ask if a mans at home, and to say that he'll stand on the doormat till he is. Nobody writes threatening letters about money to this place. It's freedom sir, it's freedom...we have got to the bottom, we can't fall, and what have we found? Peace" (*Little Dorrit* 103).

A less sanguine version of the effects of imprisonment on character is one that describes Mr. Dorrit as one who has "the jail-rot...upon him, and the impurity of his prison worn into the grain of his soul..." (*Little Dorrit* 273). This idea of the prison atmosphere infiltrating the very interiors of the mind is clearly manifest in the novel's description of Little Dorrit's brother Tip: "Wherever he went this foredoomed Tip, appeared to take the prison walls with him...until the real immovable Marshalsea walls asserted their fascination over him, and brought him back" (*Little Dorrit* 116).

The Marshalsea prison therefore offers an oblique commentary on the city itself. Representing in some ways an allegory of the city, it uses similar tropes of enclosed, confining space that seems to morally stunt and atrophy its subjects. The principle of incarceration and its effects get staged within Marshalsea in a manner that both underscores its continuities with the city in general but also throws into confusion the hierarchies that order the values of the city. The punitive system that the debtors prison represents while working on the principle of confinement and a withdrawal of privileges of mobility, fails to maintain its spatial and conceptual distinction from the rest of the city. The boundaries that distinguish the inside from the outside seem beleaguered and are considerably weakened by the discourse of the city as itself a space of incarceration. Both at the level of thematics and syntax, the novel demonstrates the impossibility of demarcating the city from the deprivations of the prison and vice versa. As Elaine Showalter points out, *Little Dorrit* is the "darkest of Dickens's novels, with its pensive imagery of labyrinths and prisons, we see the underside of Victorian authority, the shadows behind the sunny promise of bourgeois self-help, parliamentary democracy, and private charity" (Showalter 21). Furthermore, the values of the world outside the prison appear to lack coherence, while the prison manages in its own way to generate a partial coherence. The almost ritualistic giving of testimonials to Mr. Dorrit by fellow debtors props up his hollow self-image and therefore

sustains him for over two decades—a sustenance that as he later realizes is sadly not on offer in the real world where social pretensions have a short shelf life. Little Dorrit, herself the “child of the Marshalsea,” is able to detect in the values of the city an insubstantiality and shallowness that is in stark contrast to the reality of the prison which by restricting movement is able to stabilize the unpredictability and temporariness of the city. This is most in evidence when the Dorrit family tours the continent in Book the Second after Mr. Dorrit’s grand release from the debtor’s prison. For Little Dorrit the picturesque sights that she encounters seem to collide disturbingly with the memories of Marshalsea, which itself now begins to seem almost unreal in comparison to the grandeur of her current existence: “...all she saw appeared unreal; the more surprising the scenes the more they resembled the unreality of her own inner life as she went through its vacant places all day long... With a remembrance of her father’s old life in prison hanging about her like the burden of a sorrowful tune, Little Dorrit would wake from a dream of her birth-place into a whole day’s dream” (*Little Dorrit* 517). The visual splendour that confronts her in Europe almost has the effect of a sublime experience on her that disorients her and literally seems beyond the scope of her imagination. In short, such experiences are perceived as lacking the solidity and unfailing certitude that Marshalsea seems to represent. For example, in a palace on the Grand Canal in Venice, Little Dorrit is described thus:

She would think of that old gate, and of herself sitting at it in the dead of the night, pillowing Maggy’s head... And then she would lean upon her balcony, and look over at the water, as though they all lay underneath it. When she got to that, she would musingly watch its running, as if, in the general vision, it might run dry, and show her the prison again, and herself, and the old room, and the inmates, and the old visitors: all lasting realities that had never changed. (*Little Dorrit* 520)

The city thrives on appearances and as the remarkable career of Christopher Casby demonstrates, invests value in superficial images: “in the great social Exhibition, accessories are often accepted in lieu of the internal character” (*Little Dorrit* 191). However, the city “cloaked in a penitential garb of soot” is also represented as being visually impoverished in terms of its gloomy streets and its “blackened forest of chimneys” (*Little Dorrit* 67, 206). For Arthur, the dismal prospect from his lodging brings to mind the equally impoverished past that when visualized looks like a “gloomy vista by which he had come to that stage in his existence. So long, so bare, so blank...” (*Little Dorrit* 206). In the Clennam residence, visual signs take on a non-realist character: “During many hours of the short winter days, however, when it was dusk there early in the

afternoon, changing distortions of herself in her wheeled chair, of Mr. Flintwinch with his wry neck, of Mistress Affery coming and going, would be thrown upon the house wall that was over the gateway, and hover there like shadows from a great magic lantern” (*Little Dorrit* 221). The city’s visual landscape images take on a fictive quality and images assume the flickering quality of shadows projected through optical gadgets like the magic lantern.

The experience of seeing the world from the confines of the Marshalsea prison also appears to alter the very visual apprehension of the world. Little Dorrit encounters this when “looking at the sky through the barred window”: she realizes after a while that “when she turned her eyes away, bars of light would arise between her and her friend [the turnkey], and she would see him through a grating too” (*Little Dorrit* 109).

Little Dorrit herself though appears strangely positioned in relation to visuality. Inconspicuous and almost invisible as an employee in Mrs. Clennam’s house she is accustomed to “come and go as secretly as she could, between the free city and the iron gates” (*Little Dorrit* 118). But this shrinking from visibility gives her a visual centrality that Arthur Clennam comes to realize is the organizing principle that threads his world into a meaningful pattern:

Looking back upon his own poor story, she was its vanishing-point. Everything in its perspective led to her innocent figure. He had travelled thousands of miles towards it; previous unquiet hopes and doubts had worked themselves out before it; it was the centre of the interest of his life; it was the termination of everything that was good and pleasant in it; beyond, there was nothing but mere waste and darkened sky (*Little Dorrit* 801).

As in a perspective painting, all the diagonals converge on the vanishing point that is the invisible centrepiece organizing the visual space into coherence. It is the invisible point that makes visibility possible. It is this position that Little Dorrit occupies in Arthur’s life and in a larger sense in the novel as a whole. Paradoxically, her constant shrinking from any form of visibility seems to give her an unusual mobility within the novel that is most often utilized for the service of her family. Little Dorrit’s mobility in the novel is also a function of her ability to invisibilize her identity as a grown woman: “her light step and her little figure” (*Little Dorrit* 118) conceal her age as well as her uncanny knowledge of the geography of the city. Premised on the need to hide the fact that she lives in Marshalsea prison, her movements in the city demonstrate her ability to traverse the labyrinthine streets of the city with great facility and subvert the rules and logic of movement within the city. To avoid having her routes to and from Marshalsea tracked

by an observer, she engages in acts of pedestrian subterfuge: “turning at the end of London Bridge, recrossing it, going back again, passing on to St. George's Church, turning back suddenly once more, and flitting in at the open outer gate and little courtyard of the Marshalsea” (Little Dorrit 118).

Perhaps never does Little Dorrit expose herself more dangerously to the dangers of the city as when she and Maggy are forced to spend the night on the streets of London. Her non-sexualized child-like form prevents her from having to deal with any real threat of sexual aggression, though Dickens reminds us through the figure of the prostitute they encounter that the city has no other real language to describe women who wander through the streets at night. The episode is a remarkable one as it also reveals a fascinating glimpse of life in the city after dark experienced by a woman who is able to register the sights of the city from a clearly gendered perspective that tinged with fear and marked by vulnerability produces a rather unusual nocturnal tour of London.

III. GENDERED SPACES AND IN THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

Gissing's *In the Year of Jubilee* published in 1894 was the last of his novels to appear in the three-decker format, a form that was subsequently abandoned by publishers that same year. This formal shift represents the many changes outside the publishing world as well, that had occurred since the publication of Little Dorrit. However, as I will try to demonstrate, Gissing's novel is both continuous with and at the same time radically departs from the representations of the city in Little Dorrit.

In some ways the motif of the city as marked by squalor and defilement persists in Gissing's novel. *In the Year of Jubilee* does not fail to depict the degenerate aspects of the city. London, the “devourer of rural limits” is seen as subjecting traditional space to the unnatural processes of capitalist consumption: “The very earth had lost its wholesome odor; trampled into mire, fouled with builders' refuse and the noisome drift from adjacent streets, it sent forth, under the sooty rain, a smell of corruption, of all the town's uncleanliness” (Jubilee 218).

But even amidst the novel's expressions of disgust at the desecrations committed by the city, there are alternate perspectives as well from which the city is viewed. Gissing's London in *In the Year of Jubilee* is a city that has not just expanded dramatically but also one that is filtered through the experience of a higher social class. Its central characters reside in suburban London and for the most part embody class aspirations of a very different order as compared to that of the Dorrits and Clennams. The novel is very precise in its detailing of the nuances that separate the

various houses located in and around the fashionable suburb of Camberwell. The differences between De Crespigny Park (the home of Arthur Peachey) and Grove Lane (where Nancy Lord, the central protagonist, lives with her father Stephen Lord) on the one hand, and Champion Hill (where Nancy meets Tarrant for the first time) on the other, are sufficiently registered in order to prepare the reader for Nancy's infatuation with Tarrant. In fact, later on in the novel, Tarrant teases Nancy's provincial morality, which he sneeringly describes as “Camberwellism” (Jubilee 182). Evidently it is the desire to work her way out of the limitations of the suburb that lead her to question the stifling morality of her class: “Nancy hated it. She would have preferred to live even in a poor and grimy street which neighboured the main track of business and pleasure” (Jubilee 14).

Nancy leads a sheltered life under the severe and watchful eye of her father Stephen Lord and perceives the city as a space that denotes excitement and a certain degree of freedom. The novel describes her experience of the city during the Jubilee celebrations in terms that articulate an unmistakable celebration of the exhilarating rush of energy that the city and its crowds generate. For Nancy, the press of bodies around her offer at one level, an escape from the gendered regulations that tie her down in the Lord household. But as the passage is at pains to demonstrate, the pleasures of losing oneself in the crowd appear to appeal to not just her identity as a woman:

No one observed her solitary state; she was one of millions walking about the streets because it was Jubilee Day, and every moment packed her more tightly among the tramping populace.... there was little noise; only a thud, thud of footfalls numberless, and the low, unvarying sound that suggested some huge beast purring to itself in stupid contentment. Nancy forgot her identity, lost sight of herself as an individual. Her blood was heated by close air and physical contact...[c]ould she have seen her face, its look of vulgar abandonment would have horrified her. (Jubilee 68-69)

Here Nancy seems to enjoy precisely that which enables her to forget her gender and indeed her sense of self. The depersonalized pleasure of being indistinguishable from the mass of bodies fills her with the sense of freedom that such a moment represents.

This freedom is also a product of the anonymity that the city seems to offer: “All she had to do was to press onward with the people around her; save by chance, she could not possibly be discovered” (68). This conception of the city, as being a space that ensures the possibility of action that goes unobserved in the impersonal and anonymous atmosphere of the city, impinges on the very form of the novel. If

subjects in the city are able to elude the grids of imposed intelligibility and can act without fear of exposure then there needs to be a compensatory logic to legitimize a narrative control that registers the actions of individual agents in a moral scheme. Gissing's novel enacts this moral and epistemological crisis and thereby produces a text that appears deeply divided against itself. These divisions are apparent at a number of levels. For instance, in a scene that appears to run directly counter to the sentiments expressed by Nancy during the Jubilee celebrations the novel describes her ascent to the top of the Monument that Crewe takes her where she feels a dramatically different sort of exhilaration—this time not of losing oneself in the multitude of bodies but of feeling a moment of total transcendence and egoistic self-importance: "As soon as she recovered from the first impression, this spectacle of a world's wonder served only to exhilarate her; she was not awed by what she looked upon. In her conceit of self-importance, she stood there, above the battling millions of men, proof against mystery and dread, untouched by the voices of the past...her senses seemed to make literal the assumption by which her mind had always been directed: that she—Nancy Lord—was the mid point of the universe" (Jubilee 104).

Both attitudes—that of desire for immersion in the many, and egoistic delusions of grandeur—are perceived to be problematic in the novel. The narrative attempts to resolve this by engineering her re-appropriation into the confines of bourgeois domesticity. Nancy, alone and unemployed in the city, comes to "an understanding of her insignificance". She realizes that "in the battle of life every girl who could work a sewing-machine or make a match-box was of more account than she" (Jubilee 297). The knowledge that "[she] is a coward; she dreaded the world" and the acknowledgement of "the blessedness of having money and a secure home" completely re-orient her with regard to the allure of the city (Jubilee 297): "A man she said to herself, may go forth and find his work, his pleasure, in the highways; but is not a woman's place under the sheltering roof" (Jubilee 297).

This volte-face from the early sections of the novel where she dreams of the city as zone of freedom and opportunity prepares the way for her unresisting co-optation into the experimental marital arrangements that Tarrant believes in. She is left with little choice but to accept the relationship on his terms in return for the security of a home for herself and her child.

Another register that marks the novel's deep ideological divisions is that pertaining to the novel's attitudes to the visual surfaces of the city. Gissing's London offers a dense forest of symbols and signs which themselves constitute an "information system" that characters need to access and

decode in order to communicate meaning. The visual exuberance of the city produces a sort of imbalance that always leaves city spaces open to change and transgression. In many ways, symbolic value in the city belongs to those who/are able to deploy and decode signs and appearances to their own advantage. However, this alone does not succeed in explaining the visual logic of the city, which by its sheer exuberance fails to be accounted for by any one interpretative grid.

The subjects of the city have to negotiate the sheer profusion of visual signs instanced in the novel's representation of advertising that clearly stands in for the new visual regimes that threaten a genuine crisis in the visual landscape: "High and low, on every available yard of wall, advertisements clamored to the eye: theatres, journals soaps, medicines, concerts, furniture, wines, prayer-meetings—all the produce and refuse of civilization announced in staring letters, in daubed effigies, base, paltry, grotesque" (Jubilee 309). The epistemological crisis that results from this flattening of value that advertising produces is most starkly expressed during Nancy's trip to the city in the company of Samuel Barmby. Sitting in the tram-car she observes "the rows of advertising...somebody's 'Soap'; somebody's 'High-class Jams; and behold, inserted between the Soap and the Jam—'God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoso believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life'" (Jubilee 60). The narrator at this point steps in to point out the de-sensitization that urban subjects like Nancy appear to have suffered which prevent them from registering the collapsed hierarchies of value: "Nancy perused the passage without perception of incongruity, without emotion of any kind. Her religion had long since fallen to pieces, and universal defilement of Scriptural phrase by the association of the market place had in this respect blunted her sensibilities" (Jubilee 61).

However, the novel is far more ambivalent about characters like Luckworth Crewe who represent the new entrepreneurial class. Crewe makes a career in advertising and believes that "till advertising sprang up, the world was barbarous" (Jubilee 74). For Crewe "the streets of London were so many chapters of romance always of today, for he neither knew nor cared about historic associations" (Jubilee 106). Guiding Nancy through "the great thoroughfares, and by hidden streets of which Nancy had never heard of" (106) Crewe reveals an identity that has little but ambition and business acumen to distinguish him from the crowds that swirl around them. His sexual energy is one that derives from precisely his "coarse but strong features vivid with festive energy" (Jubilee 63). Nancy is however conflicted about the attractions of men like Crewe. Later in the novel after she encounters Tarrant, the novel spells out the distinct

divisions in her attitudes to male sexuality: “Comparing him [Tarrant] with Luckworth Crewe, she felt only a contemptuous distaste for the coarse vitality and vigor, whereto she had half surrendered herself, when hopeless of the more ambitious desire” (Jubilee 113).

In the Year of Jubilee thus struggles to articulate a theory of desire that can negotiate the complex dynamics of the city and in attempting to do it, interestingly pits two models against each other that represent radically different notions of intimacy. As opposed to the heady and “vulgar abandonment” (Jubilee 71) that comes from giving in to the seductive energy of the city, the novel opposes Tarrant’s more aesthetically distanced sexuality that bases itself on a theory of desire which is constructed around avoiding the threatening disgust that the body is seen as capable of generating:

The common practice of man and wife occupying the same room is monstrous, gross; it's astounding that women of any sensitiveness endure it. In fact, their sensitiveness is destroyed. Even an ordinary honeymoon generally ends in a quarrel as it certainly ought to... People get to think of themselves as victims of incompatibility, when they are merely suffering from a foolish custom—the habit of being perpetually together. (Jubilee 178)

Although the novel attempts to compensate for its contradictions by overstating Nancy’s

total capitulation to the decidedly male chauvinist philosophy of Tarrant, it fails to provide any sense of closure to the conflicts that the novel stages. It is such divided philosophies of intimacy, generated as they are out of the contradictions of class and gender ideologies, which account for the rich open-ended provisionality of novels like *In the Year of Jubilee*.

IV. CONCLUSION

In both *Little Dorrit* and *In the Year of Jubilee* it is the city that structurally informs and generates the multiple and often contradictory ideologies that compete at the level of form. Although both *Little Dorrit* and Nancy Lord are in different ways products of their urban environments, their attempts to fashion their identities suggest the different degrees to which the city and its spatial grammar determine to a large extent the kinds of mobility and resistance possible. On the one hand, there is a discourse that quite clearly sees the city as structuring experience through the stranglehold of rules and prohibitions that the city imposes on its subjects. The monstrous and soulless logic of the consumerist city seems too impersonal and totalizing a system to admit of any escape or resistance. On the other hand, the whole plot is premised on the possibility of finding

a language to articulate hope for those who resist and refuse to buy into the ideology of urban existence. As I have attempted to demonstrate through a reading of the novels, descriptions of the city often encode a disordered and contradictory set of semantic values that disrupt the very syntax of its representational protocols.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bachelard, Gaston. (1969) *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press.
- [2] Certeau Michel de (1988) .“Walking in the City”. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Randall. Berkeley: University of California Press 1988. 91-111
- [3] Deffenbacher, Kristina. (2002). “The Psychic Architecture of Urban Domestic Heroines: North and South and Little Dorrit”. *Victorians Institute Journal* 30
- [4] Dickens, Charles. (1985) *Little Dorrit*. London: Penguin Books.
- [5] Gissing, George.(1976). *In the Year of Jubilee*. Sussex: Harvester Press.
- [6] Grossman, Jonathan H. (2012) *Charles Dickens' Networks: Public Transport and the Novel*. New York: OUP
- [7] Miller, J. Hillis.(1959) *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- [8] Showalter, Elaine. (1979) “Guilt, Authority, and the Shadows of Little Dorrit”. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 34 :1 20-40.
- [9] Williams, Raymond. (1973) *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford University Press.